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On the Genealogy of Creativity

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On the Genealogy of Creativity

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There are few English nouns that have generated such relentlessly good publicity as the word 'creativity'. It is increasingly found scattered across the literature of the arts and sciences, industry, business management, information technology, education and government. It has been called the key to economic growth, the 'decisive source of competitive advantage', and the 'very heart' of 'wealth creation and social renewal'. It is also a burgeoning object of study in the humanities, where it is increasingly applied across spheres and disciplines, most notably in the new interdisciplinary schools of Creative Industries, as well as in the mainstream of the traditional humanities in the rhetoric of the 'new' humanities.

This paper investigates the cultural construction of creativity in the context of the history of ideas. It understands creativity not as a given human attribute or ability, but as an idea that emerges out of specific historical moments, shaped by the discourses of politics, science, commerce, and nation. It shifts the ground of analysis away from the naturalised models that have traditionally dominated the field of creativity research, in order to highlight the historicity of a concept that is more commonly deemed to be without history.

Camilla Nelson lectures in Literature and Communications at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. She is the author of two novels, *Perverse Acts*, for which she was named as one of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Best Young Australian Novelists of the Year, and *Crooked*, which was shortlisted in the 2009 Ned Kelly Awards. Camilla has twice been invited to be a judge of the prestigious NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the Kathleen Mitchell Award, and appointed to the board of the NSW Writers' Centre. She has published in the related fields of creativity and cultural history in a range of academic journals including *Text*, *New Writing*, *Rethinking History* and *Cultural Studies Review*. Camilla has a Doctorate of Creative Arts from UTS.